

WHO OR WHOM

A One Act Play in Three Scenes.....by Virginia Vidich

Characters

Doll
Genevieve
Mr. Smith
Owner
Policeman

SCENE I

As the curtain opens a woman is seated at a cafe table center stage. There are two other tables on the stage, one right center, one up stage left. A bleached blonde is seated at right center, and a man, wearing dark glasses is seated at the table at the left. During the course of the first scene these two characters remain motionless, holding stylized positions. The man is reading racing forms. The blonde stares into space. Only on her table is a bottle, one of immense size and a very small liquor glass. In the background a juke box is playing Tea For Two Cha Cha. As the curtain opens the woman at the center table turns to the table at her right. She is in her late thirties, and is dressed in a frilly manner, with a foolish floppy hat; however, there is a veneer of culture and respectability about her. Her speech is erratic, sometimes affected, other times strangely sincere. She is a combination of artifice, banality and whimsy, and her speech reflects these transitions from the spurious to the genuine.

DOLL: Personally, I prefer coffee - very black with lots of sugar, like the French drink it, or is it the Turks? Remember that expression - work like a Turk Cha Cha Cha? Where's the imagination today, Genevieve? (She stops, listens.)

DOLL: Maybe I am getting old. But that doesn't jaundice my judgement. Wine improves with age. You, on the other hand, are just a style chameleon. Don't forget - last year's chemise is this year's nightgown. (She pauses, laughs shrilly reacts with facial gestures).

DOLL: That's not true! My judgement about books is as good as yours. But who reads anyway? (Turns to man).

DOLL: What's that, Mr. Smith? (Pauses, registers shock, clicks her tongue).

DOLL: Tch, tch. I wouldn't have thought it of you. You seemed so different than the others, more refined, more - (Tone changes to a high key) Oh, well, horses run around, their feet are on the ground and who will wind the clock when I'm away? Who's the favorite for tomorrow's race, Mr. Smith? (Pauses, shakes her head).

DOLL: Of course a horse! (shrugs her shoulders and her voice becomes dramatic and ominous). Our footsteps are giant spore for the grey ghouls who stalk us into the darkening night. And the owls are very much wiser than fools. For on the island of love's remorse the pebble tears roll off the cliff. Wrinkling the lake's grey placid face. Sounding, the round bell echoes of hollow grief. (Pause, and a change to a conversational manner). Don't you agree, Genevieve? Last night you explicitly told me that you loathed tapioca pudding because it reminded you of -- (Her hand quickly covers her mouth.)

DOLL: I'm sorry, dear. It wasn't kind of me to mention the subject again. Of course it's painful for you. (Slowly, and with feeling). You've traveled a distant past and this present isyday enough. Twilight can't come soon when the grass is green and sings a fragrant lullaby. (Hums Greensleeves). Genevieve, do you enjoy snow? (with nostalgia) I often dream of snuggling deep between the icy sheets, but then I always awake when the cold snow crackles and purrs. (Desperately) There's no place to rest, Genevieve. No place, no rest. (She leans her head on her arms, sighing deeply, then abruptly changes her mood).

DOLL: There's an old saying that I once learned at the knees of my lap dog, or was I on his lap? Never mind- he didn't either. What was I saying about dogs that the world is going to? No, that's not true. I feel that the state of the world at present is. Just that, Genevieve, no more, no less. (Pause) We must be content with our weary selves - those whirling winding tops that won't stop until we drop into warm graves. (In tone of TV commercial) Orlon-filled, pine-scented, guaranteed to preserve intact our bones until the time when zoning permits the excavation of new pits. Yes, that's the state we're in. But don't pine for that box, Genevieve. Pristine, pure bliss, don't pick your nose, Genevieve. It's not done in company. Privately is another matter. (Pause. Shelights a cigarette.)

DOLL: Well, we all have our foibles. Mr. Smith here barks at the moon - the dog! And yesterday received a signal back in code. Translated it read: (very fast) Number seven horse looks good from here. Signed, Roquefort. (She pauses, looks askance at Genevieve.)

DOLL: And remember, Genevieve, you saw the striped tigers clawing the shades of night, ripping to shreds the twilight peace of mind until the moon laughed and split in two and said: "Now, Gentlemen, there's enough moon for both of you!" (Recited quietly, but with pathos:)

Tigger, tigger in the dark
Hark Hark the lonely lark
For whom the bells toll
For whom the bells toll.

DOLL: (Resuming her normal conversational tone) Who wrote those lines? Oh yes, you're always so right. Speaking of horses, did you know the Arabs have 5000 words to describe camels? I only know one - camelflage. (very elated) And Genevieve, the cereal companies are running a contest on different ways of saying corn flakes. Let's see - corny, flakey, corn flakey, flacorn- (Pause).

DOLL: You think I have a chance? How cereal of you! But, Genevieve, I won't accept I won't accept because I don't eat breakfast except in the morning. Oh. You're leaving us, Mr. Smith? You never stay long. I suppose my conversation bores you. Yet at least you should finish our drink. What is so stale as a bottle of ale that leaves its trail of bitterness? Ta. Ta. (She motions goodby, rises and joins Genevieve, who shows no awareness of her presence.)

DOLL: (In a loud whisper) It's none of my business, but I noticed that Mr. Smith has indicated a considerable interest in you. (She winks meaningfully) He even twitched his left eyebrow in your direction, or was it his right? Yes and he stamped his feet and called, Waiter! Surely that means something, Genevieve? Aren't you intrigued? (Pause. Her gestures indicate disagreement with Genevieve's remarks).

DOLL: My fantasy! Mine! Don't be absurd. He likes your type - bleached blondes - he once told me that in a weak moment. Or was it his strong silence that convinced me? And your stares across the table ripple the air with significance. (Pause, dismisses remark with gesture).

DOLL: Of course I know he slept with you. That means nothing. (Said quaintly and with feeling) But what if he gently touched your arm, ruffled your corn silk hair, fondled you...(pause) hands that men are supposed to love to touch but never do because (loudly) MEN ARE SO IMPATIENT, SO LACKING IN SEX. (Her tone changes again to one of quiet nostalgia). Remember Mort who cried in

court, "You're wrong. It was not the shape of her breasts but the lure of the salted wind, blowing her hair into golden rivulets?" (She seems ready to cry).

DOLL: Oh, Genevieve, don't you ever wish someone would put their arms around you and not want anything else? I wonder what's the price for that.
(Now feeling better, she starts to sing gaily).

DOLL: Georgie porgie puddin' and pie.
Kissed the girls and made them cry.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Genevieve together again.

DOLL: (Pauses, winks). No! I didn't mix it up! Genevieve, you should be ashamed of yourself forgetting your Mother Goose-OOOPS. (She rises abruptly) Who did that? (She turns around as the owner of the cafe, a fat, pudgy middle-aged man, who enters left, stands behind her. He turns off the juke box and locks the door on the right.)

OWNER: Here's your check - sixty three cents. I'm enclosing up.

(Doll picks up her enormous green bag from the floor beside the center table, fumbles in it and finally produces the correct change to the penny, counting it **loud** as she gives it to the owner. Then she replaces the bag on the floor where it remains after she exits.)

DOLL: There you are. (She turns to her companion) Come along Genevieve, I guess we can't do any more business tonight.

OWNER: Goodnight, ladies! (He laughs derisively as Doll exits, but takes no notice of the other two people seated at the tables who have remained in the same position for the entire scene.)

SCENE II

Same cafe. Next morning. Doll enters the cafe upstage right and approaches the owner who is wiping off the tables. TEA FOR TWO CHA CHA is playing on the juke box.

DOLL: (In a conciliatory tone) I'm terribly sorry to bother you but I left my green purse here last night. It was on this table. (She moves to center stage). Perhaps you found it.

OWNER: (Boldly looks her up and down) Who are ya? I never seen ya before. There was no lady in here last night and I ain't seen any lady's purse.

DOLL: But surely you remember me? I sat right here at this table; then I moved and joined Genevieve at this table and Mr. Smith was seated over there. I paid my bill - it was sixty-three cents - and then we left. And in my hurry I forgot my bag. I didn't discover the loss (pause) until I arrived home.

OWNER: (Annoyed) Look, lady. I'M busy. I never seen ya before and I ain't found any purse, bag, pocket book or anything else when I cleaned up this morning. So don't start any trouble. Just move on.

DOLL: But this is ridiculous. How can you stand there and deny that I was here last night? You saw me with your own eyes. You even had the effrontry to - well, I won't say it. Yet what could be worse than my purse? (Pause. She snaps her fingers). Why you probably stole it!

OWNER: (Angry) Look lady, don't make no accusations like that or I'll call the police.

DOLL: Please do! I have witnesses.

OWNER: Yeah? Well you'll need 'em in court becuz you're nuttin' but a cheap broad trying to take me for a ride. Your story's as full of holes as a sieve.

DOLL: (Disturbed; her speech becomes strained as she loses contact with him) But my purse. Oh dear. It contains all my papers, letters, snapshots, (faster) a lock of hair, a lottery ticket, liminol, Lineolin's speech, bagel and lox, toothbrush, fly ointment, and oh yes, that furry feather from a fox I found.

OWNER: Aw scram! You're cluttering up my place.

DOLL: (Suddenly aware of the owner) Why I-I-I've never been insulted like this before. You're a boor and a thief and I shall go to the police!

OWNER: (Sarcatically) Please do! If I'm a bore you're a

SCENE III

TEA FOR TWO CHA CHA is playing on the juke box. Two people are seated at different tables. Genevieve is seated at right center, and Mr. Smith is seated at the table upstage left. The center table is unoccupied, but the large green purse is conspicuous on the floor beside the table. As the curtain opens the two figures are in the same position they held during Scene I.

Then suddenly they become alive. Genevieve starts swaying her body to the beat of the music, and Mr. Smith nods his head and taps his feet while continuing to read the racing forms. Genevieve, the wise-cracking realist, presents a contrast to Doll. Her normalisty and vulgarity should at the same time convey the impression of sensitivity to Doll's plight. She is hard-boiled but a good egg.

GENEVIEVE: Personally, you prefer coffee, but man, I dig tea. It's, as you say, hip cha cha cha. Ha, Ha! But, Doll, you've slipped. Your age is showing. (Brief pause. She pretends great annoyance) Don't annoy me, Doll. You're tied in a sack regardless of season.

MR. SMITH: (Aside to the audience, and said out of the corner of his mouth) A sick sack!

GENEVIEVE: You're the original culture vulture. Listen., lover, you can't tell a book from its cover.

MR. SMITH: (Not looking up from his racing forms) I read. Sure thing. Bookie numbers, racing sheets, between the sheets (He winks lewdly at Genevieve, then returns to his reading and continues talking out of the corner of his mouth). Favorite for tomorrow's race? Hi-Fi for the first race, Tune-In for second. But I got inside dope from a disc jockey. If ya play it straight, they'll break even. They'll give Hi-Fi the needle.

(Mr. Smith resumes reading; Genevieve makes an expression as if to gag.)

GENEVIEVE: Please Doll, tapioca reminds me of (pretense of gagging) ice cream, you scream, we all scream for (loudly) HI-FI. (Brief pause while Genevieve resumes her dead-pan expression.)

GENEVIEVE: The difference between you and me, Doll, is that I need no lullaby. I just keep running for life is a fast course and the track rough going. Just don't get into a rut. And watch out for those flying hoofs - the kicks. In the end - you're lucky if you have enough life left to die. (She stretches, yawns, and then collapses on the table,

but her pose is a stylized one. After a brief pause, she looks up, her face softens and she speaks gently).

GENEVIEVE: Easy, easy, Doll. Please don't let life bug ya. Some day yo'll bed down. Find a cloud for a pillow and the Lord will blow the moon out. (Pause while she picks her nose carefully and deliberately, then stops and gapes at Doll with that blank expression.)

GENEVIEVE: I'm sorry Doll. I though I was alone - in a room full of people. Whose to nose? (Carefully crosses her legs, opens her purse and begins to powder her face vigorously.)

GENEVIEVE: Roquefort? Ah ha! That man on the moon's from Illinois. Roquefort, Illinois. (Her laugh is shrill and affected. She now applies her lipstick, making faces while doing it.)

GENEVIEVE: Who wrote THAT? Dooneo. Sounds Blakant or Shilly.

MR. SMITH: (suddenly agitated) Filly, I heard you say? (Fast tempo) Which race, which horse, which number?

GENEVIEVE: No horse, Mr. Smith. Doll here just finished her course - in English literature. (She turns to Doll's table, quickly ignoring Mr. Smith, and commences to tweeze her eyebrows. She winces with pain.)

GENEVIEVE: What a mind, Doll! You're corny enough to win that week-end trip to the moon, expenses paid.

(Mr. Smith rises, gestures goodbye with a mere twist of his palm. Genevieve gives him the once-over as he exits, turns to audience and bares her teeth.)

GENEVIEVE: He's a blank, Doll! Take away his piece, dark glasses, swindle suit, BVD's jock strap and what do ya got? You call that a Man? You and your love talk. Fool's fantasies. Wise up, Doll. (She starts to comb her hair, flicking the sediment on the floor.)

GENEVIEVE: As for Mort - (she stops combing hair and becomes wistful). He was a sweet boy. (Shrugs her hands, then parts her hair) Yet he never amounted to much. Too soft. Ne stomach for the hard breaks. Sure, he served his time, but he couldn't adjust to those bars without drinks. Like a lot of us, I s'pose. (Finished with her toilet, she chucks all her paraphenalia into her bag, snaps it shut decisively and folds her hands.)

GENEVIEVE: But with Smith, it's another matter. Too racy for my taste. And you know I know the score - having been bored in bed with him. Bored in bed, bed and board. It's all the same. (She stretches her arms and legs, admiring her pose)

GENEVIEVE: Doll, you're so Humpty Dumpty. Ha ha ha. But that's not how I recall my BVD's. I mean my ABC's.

(At that moment the owner and a policeman enter the stage

and walk to the center table, ignoring the presence of Genevieve. The policeman, in the manner of a big-timer, ostentatiously picks up the large green purse from the floor).

POLICEMAN: Well, I'll be a horned owl - a lady's purse. Just where she said she left it. Fits her description too - Green leather, gold clasp. (Turning to the owner) Say, Mister, who's kidding who?

GENEVIEVE: (To the audience) Ya mean, who's kidding whom?

*Final Curtain -